

Comments Presented at the House Committee on Agriculture

Hearing on

The Establishment of the Department of Homeland Security

On Behalf of

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association

The National Pork Producers Council

The American Sheep Industry Association

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By

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National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Gary Wilson, a cow-calf producer from Ohio and Chairman of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Cattle Health and Well-being Committee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's proposal to create a Department of Homeland Security. I do so on behalf of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) and the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI). This hearing is important and we are glad to be able to participate.

The President's proposal to create a Department of Homeland Security is commendable. We support the efforts to better streamline the work currently being conducted by the many different agencies to protect America from those who wish to cause intentional harm. We are also pleased with the fact that the threats to the agricultural sector are included in this proposal. Animal agriculture has fought for many years to raise the awareness that we are vulnerable to the introduction of foreign pests and diseases that could devastate our industries and the food supply.

It would be very easy for our associations to stand here today and say "NO" to this proposal. It could also be very easy for us to say "YES" to this proposal, or portions of it. However, at this time, we have numerous questions we feel need to be addressed and answered by the White House and Congress before we can make an educated decision on what is best to ensure the continued protection of American agriculture. These questions are attached to our testimony.

At this time, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you our perspective of over 100 years of experience in working closely with the USDA, State animal health officials, veterinarians and animal scientists to prevent the introduction and spread of new animal diseases into the United States, and control and eradicate animal diseases and pests already present in this country.

In the last 100 years we have created a series of formidable barriers to the introduction of foreign animal diseases. As a result of these systems, while Foot and Mouth Disease is found on all but 2 continents, North America and Australia, we have been free of this disease for over 70 years.

The barriers we have put in place are designed to be science-based and measured according to risk. They include the following components:

1. Intelligence information from around the world, and from the Office of International Epizootics, is used to develop a list of countries, diseases, and the products, articles, or animal movements that must be controlled to prevent introduction into the U.S.
2. The USDA, in concert with the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Customs Service, uses this information to place import restrictions as to which products are prohibited from being exported to the United States.

3. The USDA, Customs and FDA then play an active role at our ports of entry to ensure said products, articles, or animals indeed are kept out of the U.S. This is viewed as our first line of defense, or first firewall, and one of the most important in preventing a disease outbreak.
4. Inside the boundaries of the United States, the USDA-APHIS cooperates with State animal health officials and the FDA to provide a second firewall in case products, articles or animals escaped detection at the borders or ports/points of entry. This State and Federal cooperation is our second firewall guarding against foreign animal diseases.
5. The third firewall is biosecurity at the farm and ranch level, including quick identification of diseases.
6. Last but not least, agencies, working in cooperation with animal agriculture, have designed an aggressive control and eradication system in the unlikely event a disease outbreak occurs.

Regardless of how the Department of Homeland Security is designed, we firmly believe that this science and risk-based process of determining and guarding against threats with a multiple series of firewalls will be the basis for our continued success. These must be the guiding principles.

Our vision of the Department of Homeland Security's role is to ensure that potentially dangerous people, products, articles, animals, etc. do not enter the United States. Quite simply, if they can't get in, they can't do harm.

In this regard, we can see a role for a single agency or department held responsible to keep our borders safe and impenetrable. There is merit in consolidation of agency efforts, especially those that will ensure we have a 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy in place at our ports and "portals" of entry in the United States.

As an example, during the most recent Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in the United Kingdom, we met several times with USDA-APHIS and the U.S. Customs Service to ensure they were doing everything they could to prevent the introduction of this disease. Additionally, both APHIS and Customs officials recognized that computer systems and communications were not what they should be and that action must be taken.

During these meetings and others over time, it has always come to mind as to the necessity of four Federal agencies (INS, Customs, FDA and USDA-APHIS) working at our ports of entry. At the same time, we have concerns that many "portals" of entry, such as over-night shipping destinations from all over the world remain relatively unprotected.

As part of our evaluation we have discussed a model in which we see a well-funded USDA-APHIS being a vital partner with the new Department of Homeland Security. In this model, USDA-APHIS would contribute their capability to scan the globe for disease

threats, provide real-time dynamic information and direct the ports of entry as to what to prohibit. It would seem the human intelligence community and related agencies would play a comparable role in providing information to the Department of Homeland Security as to what people or other products or articles represent threats.

While we do see merit in consolidation of efforts, the current proposal to incorporate all APHIS functions into the Department of Homeland Security raises many questions and concerns. There are many functions of APHIS critical to the future competitiveness of agriculture in the United States. Farmers and ranchers have developed a very good working relationship with APHIS to meet mutual animal health goals, and this must not be overlooked as discussions continue on the architecture of the Department of Homeland Security.

There are several components in a consolidation effort that concern us, and that we believe may not be coherent in the context of a single department. They include the development of diagnostic tools for monitoring, surveillance, control and eradication of domestic disease in the United States, the detection of exotic or emerging or new diseases, the certification of exports, descriptive studies of current animal production practices, sanitary and phytosanitary standards and associated international trade efforts and negotiations.

It is also unclear how functions of APHIS such as wildlife services, biologics, and vaccine manufacturing for domestic diseases would fit into the Department of Homeland Security.

This is a brief summary of our thoughts. We are very supportive of this process and of continuing this dialogue. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue of importance to all Americans. We look forward to working closely with you as the Department of Homeland Security is designed.

The attached questions provide additional perspectives on our concerns. Thank you again for this opportunity.

**Key Questions Regarding the Role of APHIS  
If Transferred Within  
the Department of Homeland Security**

- *How will the issues that APHIS deals with that are not related to protecting from terrorism be prioritized within the new Department?*

In addition to the mission of APHIS to safeguard America's animal and plant resources from exotic pests and diseases (whether intentionally or accidentally introduced), APHIS also has missions that do not relate to protection from terrorism. They include: monitoring and managing agricultural pests and diseases existing in the US, resolving and managing trade issues related to animal or plant health, and ensuring the humane care and treatment of animals. These missions support animal and public health (through the control and eradication of zoonotic diseases) and the interests of agricultural industries.

- *The APHIS import activities would be transferred to the Department of Homeland Security but the FDA and FSIS import inspection functions are not. Why?*

A major component of the Department of Homeland Security is border security. This includes the importation of food, animals and animal products, animal feeds, drugs, biologics and other items that must be controlled at our borders to enhance human, animal and plant protection. Several agencies including APHIS, FDA and FSIS perform these critical functions.

- *Could the focus on homeland security create a more isolationist attitude (when in doubt, keep it out) and negatively impact the opportunities for agricultural trade?*
- *Will emphasis within the Department of Homeland Security become more "secrecy" driven with less openness and participatory/collaborative approaches and will the new agency be required to follow the current administrative procedures act relative to notice and comment rule-making??*
- *Will reorganization consume resources and slow progress toward achieving better preparedness and response capabilities?*
- *Plum Island is currently responsible for diagnostic testing for a number of diseases. If this facility is move to the control of "Homeland Security" what happens to this diagnostic work and to the ongoing research done by ARS at the facility since ARS is not a part of the new department?*
- *Will APHIS' plant and animal safeguarding mission remain a top priority?*

- *How will Domestic Disease Eradication, Monitoring and Surveillance Programs be managed and executed?*

Domestic diseases include, but are not limited to: pseudorabies, brucellosis, tuberculosis, scrapie, and chronic wasting disease.

The mission of protecting animal & plant health involves a significant investment in domestic pest and disease eradication, surveillance and monitoring. These programs are essential for the economic viability of American agriculture both at the farm level and for exports of U.S. plant and animal products

APHIS has many functions that are or can be viewed as relating to Homeland Security. APHIS also has many functions that are not so much homeland security issues, but are vitally important functions relating to trade and domestic issues. Does the new Secretary of Homeland Security want to certify bull semen for export? Or protect airplanes from bird strikes? Or conduct inspections for the Swine Health Protection Act?

We urge your committee to fully consider the ramifications such a move could have on the current mission of APHIS before decisions are made.